THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (DR. RAMAN): (a) As a result of various schemes, plans and programmes already implemented/ initiated by the Government, the leather industry, of late, has shown signs of recovery, particularly in exports.

(b) Under the UNDP—assisted National Leather Development Programme, on-going Small Industries Development & Employment Programme in Leather Sector (SIDE-NLDP i.e. NLDP Phase-II), Leather Technology Mission (being executed by the Central Leather Research Institute under Council of Scientific and Industrial Research of the Ministry of Science and Technology), Plan Scheme, Indian Leather Development Programme, etc. various steps for integrated development of leather industry are being undertaken from time to time depending on the needs and requirement of the leather industry.

Protection of India's Bio-Diversity Plant Varieties

1117. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state the action taken to protect India's bio-diversity plant varieties and an agriculture policy that protects farmer's rights and sets a framework for imports and exports of agro-commodities?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI MURASOLI MARAN): In order to protect the biodiversity of the country, the Government are formulating a legislation on biodiversity with the broad objectives of conservation and sustainable utilization of biodiversity and equitable sharing of benefits arising out of the use of biological resources. Protection for plant varieties based on the criteria of distinctiveness, uniformity and stability, is proposed to be given under the Protection of Plant Varieties and Farmers Rights Bill, 1999, which is likely to be introduced shortly in the Parliament. Under this law, nothing will affect the farmers' traditional rights to save, use, exchange, share and sell their farm produce of the protected variety except sale for resowing under commercial marketing arrangements. The Export-Import policy of agricultural products is governed principally by the concerns of India's food security, the maximizing of farm incomes, the need to earn foreign exchange and to augment domestic availability of agricultural products while protecting and providing avenues for rural employment.